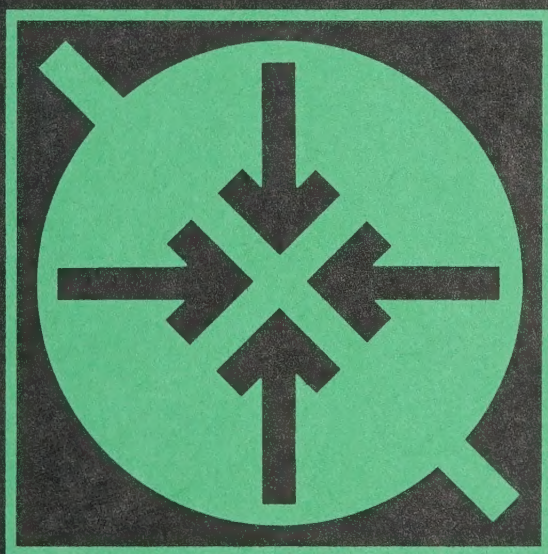


Newsletter

Blissymbolics
Communication
Foundation

Summer 1977
Volume 3, no. 3



BLISSYMBOLICS COMMUNICATION FOUNDATION

Executive Director	Harry Silverman
Programme Director	Shirley McNaughton
Associate Programme Director	Barbara Kates
Administrator	Thelma Campbell

The purpose of this Newsletter is to publish articles and news items concerning the Bliss Symbol System which utilizes visual symbols as a substitute for verbal communication for physically handicapped children without speech. Subscribers to the Newsletter are encouraged to contribute articles in order to share their symbol experiences.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: \$ 6.00 per annum. Available from:

Blissymbolics Communication Foundation
862 Eglinton Avenue East,
Toronto, Ontario. M4G 2L1
Canada

ARTICLES: Send to:

B.C.F. Newsletter,
c/o Mrs. Barbara Rush, Editor,
64 Magnolia Drive,
Hamilton, Ontario. L9C 5T2
Canada

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INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS FOUNDATION

Larry Silverman
Charles McLaughlin
Barbara Kates
Thomas Gifford

Executive Director
Programs Director
Associate Programs Director
Administration

The purpose of this Newsletter is to publish articles and news items concerning the global system which will be available as a resource for the development of research, teaching and learning. Contributors to the Newsletter are encouraged to contribute articles in order to share their special expertise.

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NOTES FROM THE EDITOR

This is the last issue in the current subscription series. A subscription renewal form appears at the back of this issue for you to remove, complete, and return to the B.C.F., in Toronto. We regret that the price has risen to \$6.00 due to increased postal charges. For your information, we do not make a profit but just break even.

.....

Thanks go to Anne Warrick for co-ordinating the drive to obtain articles from the Ottawa area which form the bulk of this issue. We are also grateful to those who, unsolicited, submitted articles to us. The whole purpose of this newsletter is to share symbol experiences with one another. Our mailing list now numbers 400, representing ten countries, and we would like to hear from you all ! Please take the time to tell us a little about what you are doing. Articles may be of any length or style, typed or handwritten. We are not a professional journal so please don't worry that you are "not good enough," - the typical answer to my requests for written pieces. It's ideas and experiences (good and bad) that we are looking for. Deadline for the Fall issue is October 15th, 1977, which gives you plenty of time ! Articles should be submitted to me at the address on page 1.

.....

Please note that Russell Cecchini's article and Sue O'Dell's Easter Card are printed as submitted, with this exception: in a few instances, combine indicators have been added to call attention to irregular usage of a symbol or symbol expression. This is a new and perhaps temporary use of the combine indicator, to signal an unusual, personal usage of a symbol.

.....

It was unfortunate that the Ottawa Convention had to be cancelled due to lack of early response. Let us hope that the B.C.F. will try again next year. Personally, I would like to see a few workshops and related symbol activities taking place on weekends. As a teacher, I have found it very difficult to obtain release from regular duties during the school year. This must be true for a number of professions. I think it would be worth a try.

.....

Reminder: Responses to any article should be sent directly to the B.C.F., in Toronto. Your letter will be forwarded to the writer of the article under discussion. This procedure enables the B.C.F., to co-ordinate information relating to particular areas of exceptionality.

.....

Send in your subscription form, write an article for the Fall issue, and have a good summer !


Barbara Rush
Editor





Man of the Month










Submitted by: Anne Warwick
Ottawa















In April, 1977, Russell Cecchini was chosen the Ottawa Rotarian's "Man of the Month." Russell was invited to speak at their monthly luncheon meeting and his speech is below. We, in the Ottawa area, are extremely proud of Russell and his achievements in the valuable work he is doing for the development of communication through symbols. Good luck, Russell, in all your future efforts.











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








   Russell Cecchini.
My name is Russell Cecchini.











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My past before symbols












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








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I helped my father with difficult words on T.V. and radio

*Rideau Regional Centre

I came to R.R.C.* when I was 7.

Now I am 24 years old

I think I went to school for 13 years.

11 years I sat and listened to my teacher

I watched the blackboard

The teacher worked with me little time because the teacher had 10 children

in classroom

The last 2 years I got a typewriter in school

That was too late for me to learn my reading and numbers

I stopped school 2 years ago I was 22 years old

The year before I stopped school I came to

symbol school

The first year I didn't like to go to symbol school

The people asked me what this symbols for. I said that

symbols to help me with what I want to say to you.

This time I started to like to go to symbol school

It is much work to learn idea symbols, they are little difficult

to learn Presently I work my symbol table with people who

not know what I say.

I am the editor here at symbol work.

The paper is for people who work with symbols.

This paper comes out every two months.

The stories are written by symbol people.

I say what is going to be the idea for the future paper.

We have meeting when I want people to start stories

I talk about past papers and future paper.

I have four people that help me put the paper together

We get letters and stories from symbol people in Canada and the

U.S.A.
United States.

The paper is growing big. I type 200 envelopes.

for each paper. I want to Toronto to get a

license for the symbol paper last year.

I wish to work for paper for a long time in future.

I think I want a home for Cerebral Palsy in Ottawa.

Thank you
Russell Cecchini


An Easter Card

Submitted by Joan Hurren
Churchill Fellow 1977
(Visiting Canada)


Following is an Easter Card from Sue O'dell to her husband. Sue is a resident of Villa Private Hospital, Toronto. She pointed to the symbols as I read the message to her.

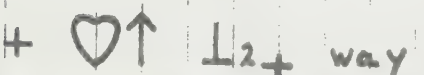

 Happy Easter



 To my husband with all my love


 This wish is sent with all my love


 For you on Easter Day

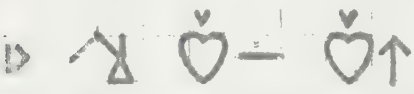

 It's meant to last forever


 And bring happiness your way


 For you're a husband who deserves


 The very best in life

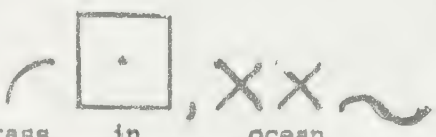




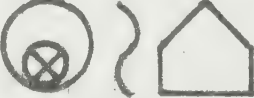



 And that's the wish that's coming


 From your proud and happy wife

"COMBINE" QUIZ

Submitted by Barbara Rush
Hamilton

Take a guess at the following concepts - answers on last page.
They were created by some of my students and reflect varying degrees of symakill and intellectual ability.

1.  grass in ocean	2.  building people sleep
3.  cloth country	4.  activity animal
5.  time bird	6.  machine fire house
7.  water colour	8.  man swim under water

Blissymbolics Communication Foundation Convention

Submitted by: Anne Warrick
Ottawa

It was with regret that the Blissymbolics Communication Foundation Convention scheduled for Ottawa June 5th - 7th, 1977 had to be cancelled, due to an insufficient number of registrants. Neither the Blissymbolics Communication Foundation nor the Ottawa Crippled Children's Treatment Centre was in a position to assist financially and with only 57 registration forms returned, with postage dates prior to April 28th (one week after the closing date for registration) the local committee and Blissymbolics Communication Foundation staff decided to cancel the event. I sincerely apologise for any inconvenience this change in planning may have caused.

The idea of a Convention was born of personal enthusiasm following favourable returns, from the survey of interest, conducted in the fall of 1976. In retrospect I can see areas where things should be done differently another time, from the planning point of view. But what do you think? Is two months insufficient time to get an indication of funding possibilities from school and health authorities? Was there insufficient information? Would we have done better to locate in a city with a greater population than Ottawa - or more central for travellers? Is there a more suitable time of the year? I would appreciate lots of correspondence with your honest opinions and constructive suggestions so that in taking a second look, we can incorporate all your ideas.

Unfortunately, if the interest in the Convention prior to April 22nd had been anything like that encountered after its' cancellation, it could have taken place and been successful. Could it be that we are becoming blasé about symbols as the Foundation grows larger, each happily doing his own thing, and losing that feeling of mutual concern and co-operation so evident at the beginning? That's not the case? I hope not, and I'll know the answer to that question by the amount of mail I'll be receiving during the summer. Hopefully, with your help, our next attempt at organizing a Convention will be a happy and successful occasion.

Letter to the Editor

from Hugh Nelson
Communications Instructor at
Rideau Regional Centre, Smith Falls

I am writing this letter in order to let my feelings be known about those people who did not bother to get involved with the first Blissymbolics Communication Foundation Convention. We at Rideau Regional Centre put together a delegation of more than twenty people to send to the Convention, but throughout the rest of the world 75 more people interested in the project could not be found. This includes symbol users. This was not to be a Convention just for fun and publicity, but to get both symbol users and people interested in symbols together to share their experiences and also learn in a more complete way what is being done for the handicapped in this direction.

We spent many hours writing down statements from our symbol users in order to have documentation as to the changes that occurred through their use of the symbols. The Panel of Symbol users would have been to me, the most important statement of success yet noted in symbol development. Let us hope that in the future we can carry a project like this one through to the finish.

I would also like to thank the staff of Rideau Regional Centre for their support of the Convention.

National Research Council

Workshop on Communication Aids

A technical workshop has been planned to review the state-of-the-art in communication aids for non-verbal, physically handicapped persons of all ages.

Purpose

To coordinate the research, development, and evaluation of communication aids through a face-to-face exchange of ideas between developers on the one hand and a variety of experienced clinical personnel on the other.

Topics

Recognized experts have been selected to present position papers on the following topics:

- the needs of non-verbal persons from infancy to adulthood
- state-of-the-art review of existing aids and their limitations
- input interfaces:
 - simple vs. complex approaches
 - development of eye-position control systems
- output interfaces:
 - Blissymbol displays and printers
 - synthesized speech
- evaluation:
 - the need for thorough evaluations and the problems of obtaining reliable results
 - evaluation of an eye-position aid
- computer-aided learning for the physically handicapped
- priorities for future research, development, and evaluation
- plus: demonstrations of prototype devices

Dates and Location

8 - 10 June 1977 - Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

Participants

Approximately 40 experienced persons, including speakers, will be selected by a planning committee, in order to achieve an appropriate mix of professional disciplines and geographic regions in Canada. A few recognized experts from the USA and overseas have been invited, also, mostly as speakers.

Proceedings

To be published following the workshop, containing the speakers' presentations plus the workshop recommendations and conclusions.

Sponsorship

Medical Engineering Section, National Research Council of Canada
Medical Research Council of Canada
Blissymbolics Communication Foundation
Canadian Medical and Biological Engineering Society
Canadian Rehabilitation Council for the Disabled
- Plus planning assistance from Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario.

Further Information And Proceedings

Write to: Peter J. Nelson,
Chairman, Workshop on Communication Aids,
Medical Engineering Section,
Division of Electrical Engineering,
National Research Council Canada,
Building M-50,
Ottawa, Ontario. K1A 0R8

"Blissful" CHIT CHAT FROM OTTAWA

By: Anne Warrick
Ottawa

Our big news is that Barbara Kates is coming to join us. I'm sure it must be hard for Barb to leave Toronto but we look forward to her arrival here with enthusiasm. We all wish Barb and her husband much success and happiness in Ottawa. Congratulations to Russel, Rotary's Man of the Month (see story).

New and ever enlarging programmes at Smiths Falls (Rideau Regional Hospital School). A copy of "Symbol Secrets" in the Children's Sections of Ottawa Public Libraries and a presentation to the staff so that they can include books of special value to symbol children on their shelves. Orientation for camp staff both residential and daytime with regard to symbols and symbol users is due to start anyday.

We also welcome to our group, Mrs. Schneider, the mother of Ms. Margaret Schneider, our new Liason Officer at B.C.F. Mrs. Schneider will provide an "outreach" programme for us in the Ottawa Valley and will bring her own special enthusiasm to the development of "rural" symbols.

How nice it was to have Joan Hurren and Joan Hambley (B.C.F. in-service visitors from Australia and Regina respectively) spending a few days in Ottawa last March. Finally, our next B.C.F. Workshop will be held at Ottawa C.C.T.C., on August 29th, 30th, 31st and September 1st, 1977.

Have a good summer.

A Multi Learning Experience For
The Severely Physically Handicapped
Non-Verbal Children at O.C.C.T.C.

By: Colette Côté
Ottawa

In the summer of 1975, a synthetic speech box (Votrax) and a teletype were installed at the Ottawa Crippled Children's Treatment Centre for the purpose of evaluation and suggestions regarding its possible use in areas of education and communication.

This was the beginning of our work with Votrax. After several months of planning, our programme, which consisted of using Votrax with Blissymbols, was ready to start. The purpose of this project was to provide a multi-sensory learning experience for the severely handicapped non-verbal children.

The initial equipment consisted of a scanning display matrix and a commercially available speech synthesiser (Votrax Tm) coupled to a remote computer from N.R.C. via telephone lines. Blissymbols were used on the display matrix. The display consisted of 32 pictorial symbols and increased to 64 as soon as the most successful candidate was ready.

The computer was used as the necessary memory so that when the child selects the symbols he wants (using his individually designed interface), the Votrax speaks each symbol individually on pressure of a speak button, and then says the whole sentence on completion. The child receives immediate error correction and immediate feedback of sentence structure.

There were five suitable candidates at the Centre to begin this particular project. The age range was from $3\frac{1}{2}$ to 11 years. Prior to the beginning of the programme, each child was assessed for physical, intellectual and language development. They were learning Blissymbols in preschool, kindergarten and in speech therapy while being trained in the use of hand functional control. As soon as the required degree of hand functional control was attained, the programme on Votrax was started.

Each session was divided into two 15 minute periods. The first fifteen minutes were more of a structured period where the candidate was asked to match individual symbols.

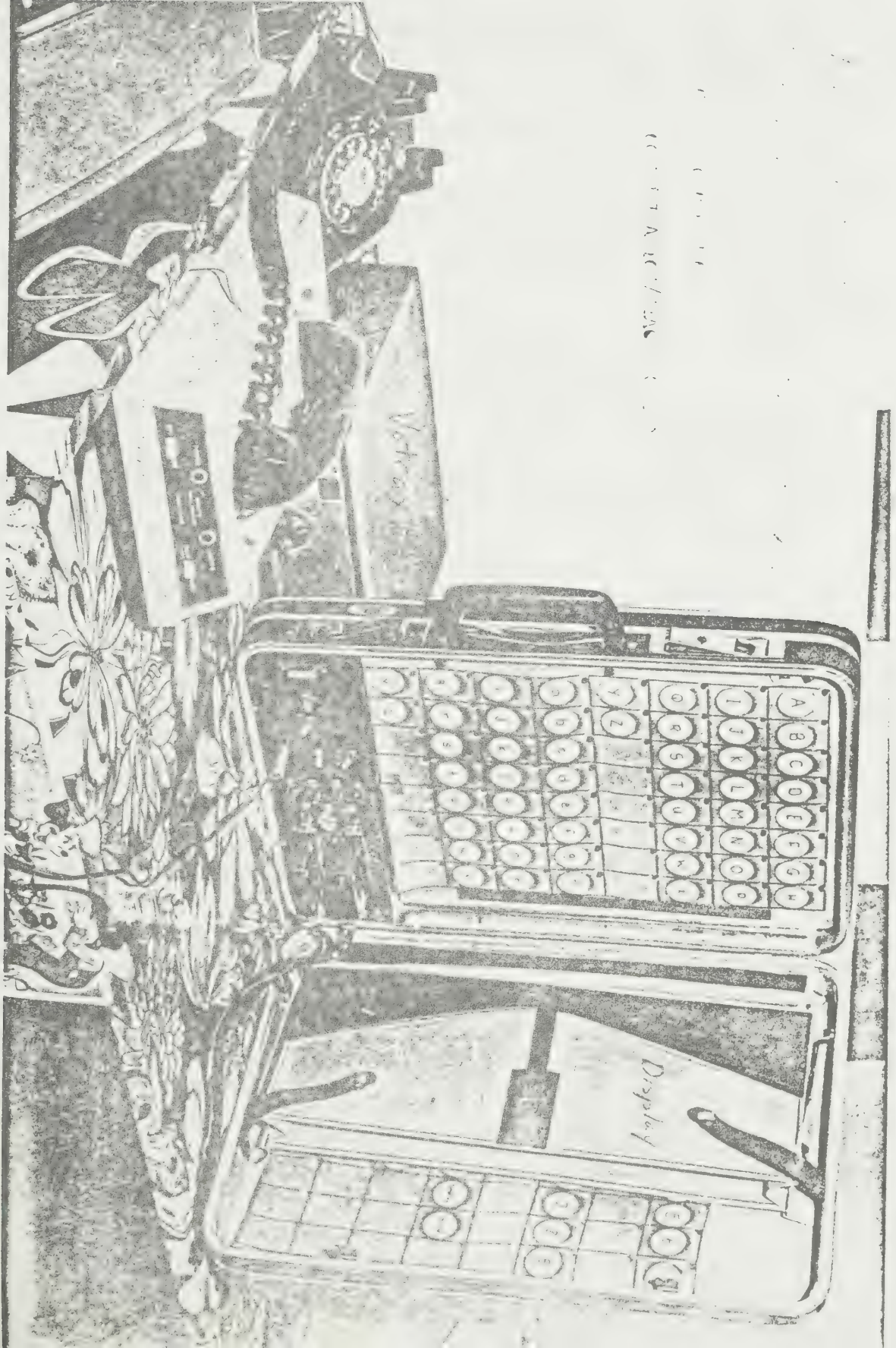
- a) from the first two upper rows of the grid.
- b) from the last two lower rows.
- c) from the entire grid.

The child was first presented with the picture/symbol cards, then with only the picture card and finally given only verbal instruction, the child had to select the correct symbols from the whole grid.

After the child was familiarized with all the symbols, we began working on sentence structure.

The second portion of the session, the unstructured programme, consisted of having a conversation with the child. The child would answer questions using the symbol previously taught and gradually answering with two or more symbols in a correct sentence structure.

W. J. A. 10/1/20



All the child's responses were recorded (written on a data form) during each session. The programme was kept sufficiently flexible to allow each child to progress at his maximum learning speed and was therefore recorded individually.

The results after a period of four months (January 1976 - April 1976) were very encouraging.

1. Each child showed an increased attention span, both visual and auditory.
2. Because of this increased attention span, there was more time spent in practicing with the equipment and therefore there was a remarkable improvement in scanning and in the total control of the individual interface.
3. The children were also more motivated in learning quickly as they wanted to listen to the Votrax speak out the symbols.
4. Because of the motivation in learning and using symbols, there was an improvement of the syntax and expressive language.
5. Because Votrax gave immediate auditory feedback to the child, there was a better initiative in the activity. We could see an improvement in self-instruction. The child was more independent and worked much better alone. The trial and error learning experience was very good for them.
6. Since the instructor did not have to constantly remind the child of any mistakes, there was an improvement in child/teacher relationship.

The programme has developed and expanded much more this year. Votrax is now being used in a Grade One classroom, not only as a communication aid, but also as a teaching aid. The computer now has 4 different programmes.

- 1) Alphabet: Votrax names each letter individually as child selects it.
- 2) Numbers: 1 to 10 plus basic arithmetic concepts; Votrax again says the numbers when the child chooses one.
- 3) Phonics: Every sound from the Grade One reading book has been programmed so that Votrax can say each individual sound separately upon command, and put them together to make a word.
- 4) Bliss: 32 and 64 Blissymbols programmes are still used and we are working towards a 128 symbols grid for better sentence structure practice.

The future also looks very promising. N.R.C. are now proceeding to develop a classroom communication system which will permit more than one child to share the synthesizer and to intercommunicate with each other and with the teacher.

Additional programs will be plugged into the computer to expand the capabilities of this classroom system. All the programs will have the auditory reinforcement from Votrax. The children will then be able to use the equipment regularly to its full potential and to their best advantage.

For further information contact:

Peter J. Nelson, P. Eng.,
Medical Engineering Section, M-50
National Research Council of Canada
Ottawa, Canada, K1A 0R8

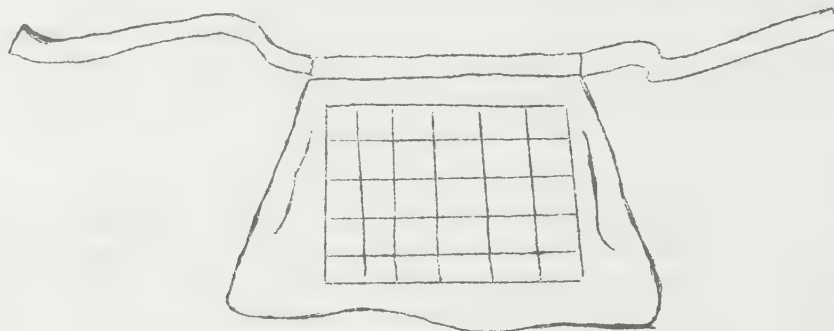
Vocal Interface (Votrax)
Division,
Federal Screw Works,
Framingham, Massachusetts.

Symbol Aprons

By: Eileen May
Ottawa

I am presently working at a school for trainable retarded children, and five of these students use symbols as a means of communication. All of them are mobile and during the day move from one activity to another. In consequence, communication boards became a nuisance rather than an asset in many situations. It was obvious that what was needed for these students was something which would allow them freedom from responsibility, but nevertheless be available to them when they had something to say. Ann Warwick, Speech Pathologist at the Ottawa Crippled Childrens Centre came up with the idea of symbol aprons, and two were made up for me to use on an experimental basis. The two students chosen to see if these aprons had any value were a boy of 5 and a girl of 11.

The aprons looked like this and were made out of good quality cotton fabric.



Laundry and embroidery markers were selected to draw approximately 100 symbols on each of the aprons and the vocabularies chosen to a large extent, reflected those on the children's Bliss boards. Using the small template the symbols were drawn upside down on the aprons so that the children would see the symbols the right way up.

I had no idea how the children would react but in the 10 weeks they have been wearing them, I have seen the aprons elevated from status symbols to limited but important communication tools.

Boy J, age 5

"J" uses his apron during story and circle time when all of the children are sitting on the floor with their teacher. In these situations the apron is easier to handle than a communication board and "J" initiates putting on the apron at these times. He regards his apron as something special for these activities and prefers to take it off when they are finished. Although "J" only uses his apron in a limited way, his teacher is positive about the results she is achieving at those times, and feels it has been a worthwhile experiment.

Girl T, age 11

"T" was enthusiastic about her apron from the beginning and is happy to wear it at home and at school. Her parents find it particularly useful for "T" when the family goes visiting.

It is much easier to locate symbols on a board than on an apron. Fabric folds frequently hiding needed symbols and "T" has to make more of an effort when communicating using her apron, and in consequence her expressions are usually reduced to the single symbol level. However she is using her apron on a daily basis particularly in situations where it is impractical to use a board.

Although these aprons have not solved all our problems in providing access to symbols they have proven useful, and I intend to make aprons for our other symbol users.

EYE POINTING

By: Anne Warwick
Ottawa

There are two children at Ottawa C.C.T.C. eye pointing to 400 Blissymbols on the numbered encoding display available from B.C.F. The original frame, similar to a picture frame, stands in an upright position at the top of a child's lap tray and contains the numbers 0 - 7 and the symbol for "repeat."

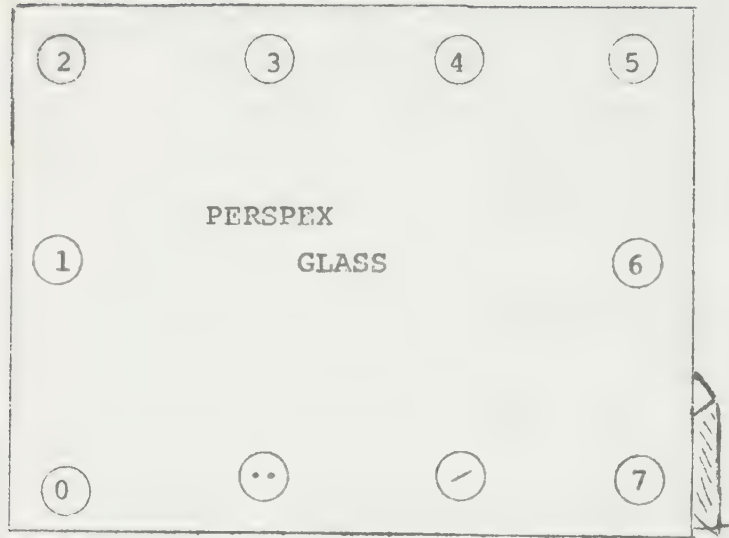
Within our setting we have developed an alternate display. The numbers required by the child are placed around a sheet of perspex (plexiglass), each number being written on small adhesive paper discs facing both the child and the person seated opposite, who is the second party in the communication process. We have also added another location showing the symbol for "cancel." The use of "yes" and "no" in eye-coding to indicate mistakes is extremely confusing. Thus, the "cancel" symbol allows the child instant correction of errors. The adhesive discs with numbers on, can be changed to colours, letters, etc., depending on the child's coding on his display. Each perspex display is held in place on the lap tray by a 3" high clip running the length of the tray (Fig. 1). The edge of the lap tray facing the child has to be built to 3" in height to accommodate the clip (Fig. 2). These displays were made for us at an approximate cost of \$25.00 but handy fathers could likely make them more cheaply.

The disadvantages to this display is the barrier between the two communicating people (not so bad if you keep the window clean!) and the muffling of speech from the verbal party. The advantages are clear visibility, flexibility in being able to change the numbers, colours, etc, around easily, and the ability to write on the central portion of the display with a grease pencil during the teaching process, e.g., one can display the child's message in the area to which she is usually looking, etc.

We also clip a modified E-tran alphabet display to the perspex for classroom spelling assignments (Fig. 3). In this process the child looks to the group of letters in which her chosen letter appears, and then looks to the corner of the perspex which relates to the corner of groups in which the letter can be found (got it)!! For example, to locate "D" the child looks to the upper middle group and then the top left corner of the perspex since D is in the top left corner of the group. The omissions in the four corners of the corner groups, are because the child would have no change of eye movement in indicating such letters if they were there. The teachers tell me that this is one of the better ideas of late - and not a symbol in sight - oh well!

Obviously the above could be adapted to a symbol display by replacing the letters with symbols - maybe a good way for the introductory 30 with "yes" and "no" displayed elsewhere.

FIG. # 1



This part of tray is raised to 3" for perspex to clip on.

3" Metal Clip

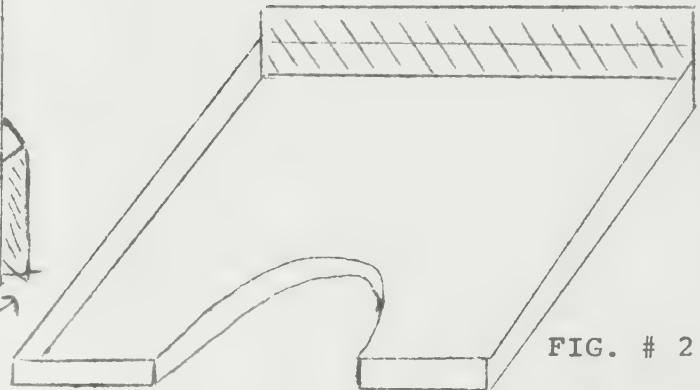


FIG. # 2

clip or clothes pins

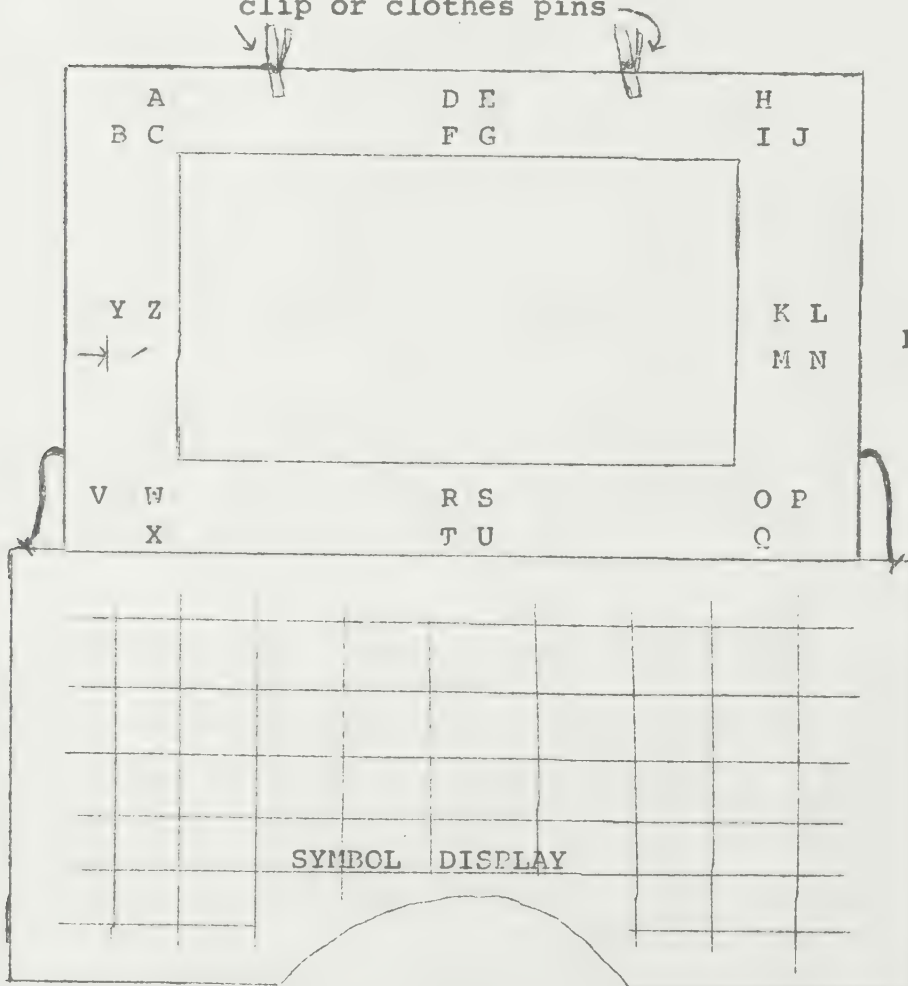


FIG. # 3

"Modified" Etran for Spelling

Shirts

Submitted by: Anne Warrick
Ottawa

We are thinking about shirts (long sleeves) with symbols placed on the arms from elbow to wrist to be used in Total Communication Classes so that mobile children always have their symbols and are using manual skills similar to the finger spelling, signing, etc., of their peers.

The preliminary investigation of symbol "iron on-s" has been done and is inexpensive. However, large orders are needed. If anyone else has further ideas or could use "iron on-s", would you please let me know.
Thanks.

COMMUNICATION IS BEAUTIFUL

By: Beverly Pettit
Pembroke, Ontario

For an hour each day, with the exception of Wednesday, a class from Developmental Skills programme in Champlain High School, numbering ten students (four students rotating for two days per week) study and communicate with Bliss Symbols. These people have handicap problems such as Cerebral Palsy, Down's Syndrome and Speech impediments. However, in our Bliss Class we are as one mind as we communicate in understanding each other.

We are working on the 200 board and with using combinations, our vocabulary travels much beyond that. Some students have difficult speech impediments while others have less trouble speaking.

Our class opens with greetings, weather talk and how we feel. We talk about why we feel happy, excited, lucky or sad as the case may be. Then we sing using the Bliss board and while maybe the words don't sound clear, the meanings are unmistakable as each person follows the words on their board. Always you hear the struggle to speak or sing as well as possible. We compose our own songs and Joy is catching.

Thirdly, we create small stories. I record these stories on the blackboard and then we take turns reading same. Everybody has something to say and sometimes I guide hands on the blackboard to make a sentence after they have shown me what they want to write. What a thrill to have someone from your class read your ideas, again Joy can't be measured.

The participation from home is very evident with these students. Many times parents come and sit through the class hour participating with us. Also I have started to write Bliss symbol letters to the student's home, under a pen name. Then mother or sister helps Johanne or Debbie etcetera, to write a return answer. To receive a letter of your very own in your own language is a little bit of heaven.

Our Principal, Mrs. MacKay, frequents the Bliss Class, thus giving opportunity for greetings and original symbol talk.

What are Blissymbols?

They are an open door into a new world of concepts, sentence structure and freedom of speech.

SYMBOL PROGRAM AT
SUNNY HILL HOSPITAL FOR CHILDREN

By: Kate Wishart
British Columbia

I was impressed by the enthusiastic response from Bliss users in the last Newsletter. After reading the articles I felt I would like to add to the correspondence from the West Coast by giving a brief summary of our program.

Bliss was introduced to Sunny Hill several years ago and we now have a well established program within our hospital. We presently have twelve Bliss symbol children, all at different levels of physical and mental ability, so we have a wide range of Bliss levels - from recognition of a few symbols to complex sentence formation on a 400 symbol board.

We are fortunate in having a multi-discipline team actively involved with these children. A speech pathologist to assess language abilities and to introduce basic symbols and syntax, an occupational therapist to position the child and help him access the symbols, a teacher involved with our older children in a special Bliss class, and a pre-school teacher who has recently expanded her program to include early symbol work as an important part of the daily schedule. Our numbers vary as children from other parts of the Province come in for intensive symbol instruction, but at present we have seven children in our classroom and five in the pre-school. The age range in our Bliss program is 4 - 16 years.

We also have a regular Bliss evening where the children can invite parents or special friends to learn more about symbols and to share ideas and information.

We recently acquired Videotape equipment and are now experiencing the technical and child performance problems of trying to record our programs on tape. If anyone is interested in exchanging information by way of video, we would welcome this exchange.

FROM AN AUSTRALIAN IN CANADA

By: Joan Hurren
Churchill Fellow 1977
c/o B.C.F.

My interest in Blissymbols began when I saw the film "Mr. Symbol Man." My husband, Bert, who is in Canada with me for four months, rang Bruce Moir, the director of the film, to invite him to Canberra and show the film to teachers and lecturers in Special Education.

Bruce spent several days at our home and showed his film twice to interested audiences of approximately 40 each time. He was obviously very involved with trying to promote the use of Blissymbols for handicapped children in Australia.

After this initial contact, I developed a regular correspondence with Charles Bliss who also first talked to teachers, therapists, and lecturers in Canberra at my invitation. I also commenced to correspond with Shirley McNaughton and now, nearly two years later, I am in Canada on a Churchill Fellowship to investigate the theory and application of the Blissymbolics Communication Programme and to take the techniques to teachers/therapists in the Australian Capitol Territory

and States of Australia where the need obviously exists for a method of communication for non-verbal children.

My personal experience in Australia in working with Bliss is limited to one profoundly deaf, hyperactive 7½ year old child with an overlay of behaviour problems. When I saw the film "Mr. Symbol Man", I immediately thought of John who had been one of our pre-school deaf children but now, years later, was not making progress in communication in the Junior Primary School. I invited his mother to attend the film showing for teachers when it was presented by Bruce Moir. She thought the system was very exciting and worth trying with John.

However, about this time a decision was made to introduce Total Communication to the non-verbal deaf children and I felt John should be given the chance to communicate in the same way as his deaf peers. It was, therefore, May 1976 before I started Blissymbols with John - at the request of his 'deaf' teachers who, at this stage, had been unsuccessful in teaching him to sign.

The symbols were an immediate success, possibly because eye contact was not necessary and also because John was very interested in small drawings and words, many of which he could recognize. I had drawn the 100 symbols, playing card size, to make a large wall chart, taking a photocopy to use on flash cards. When shown the chart, John immediately pointed to the words he recognized - toilet, eye, car, television. He was very interested and eager to match the flash cards to the chart. This was his introduction to the symbols and was certainly the longest span of concentration he had shown on something a teacher expected him to do.

A copy of the large wall chart was given to John's mother for his use at home. The second day at school he was "conversing" with symbols, e.g., "train" and "birthday" to tell me what he wanted for his birthday present. Picture scrap books were made to cover the 100 symbols and John delighted in "reading" these and matching the flash cards to those drawn in the books.

He quickly learnt all the 100 symbols (without words) and remembered their location. I used pictures, objects, toys, real things, actions and demonstration to explain the symbol meanings.

By the seventh day, other teachers were commenting on the fact that John was wanting to communicate. It was at this stage that he indicated he wanted to find the words in the Richard Scarry dictionary which he had always enjoyed looking at. I gave him help with the alphabet, with which he was already familiar, so he could achieve his objective. In several days he was able to find a symbol, word or flash card and then check the dictionary. This activity gave him great pleasure and, I am sure, a wonderful sense of achievement.

He was now using the 200 symbol chart - large size added to the wall. By the 17th day, I had introduced the 400 chart and one wall of the room was covered with Blissymbols. As he wanted to communicate, eye contact had been established consistently. Deaf signs were introduced with all the symbols and words and he began to use signs as well as symbols for communication.

I worked with John on a one-to-one basis for approximately three-quarters of an hour, four mornings each week. After eight weeks, I suggested he join his deaf peers for the morning news group. His mother sent his news in symbols for me to discuss with John, then tell the other children, putting it on the board the same as everyone else.

This became a team teaching hour and John learnt to concentrate on what the other children were "saying" instead of upsetting the whole group as he had previously due to lack of interest. At the end of the term - 14 weeks - John was returned to his class teacher to continue his communication through symbols and signing.

"Combine" Quiz Answers

- | | |
|------------|-----------------|
| 1. Seaweed | 5. Cuckoo Clock |
| 2. Motel | 6. Furnace |
| 3. Flag | 7. Paint |
| 4. Hop | 8. Frogman |

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programmes. Subscribers to the Newsletter are
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